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DEPT FOR INL, INL/T, EUR/ERA, EUR/PGI, EUR/UBI  
ONDCP FOR CHARLOTTE SISSON  
DOJ FOR OIA  
USEU FOR WAGNER AND DOJ  
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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT BACKS DOWN ON CANNABIS CULTIVATION

REF: THE HAGUE 1245

11. Summary. Dutch Parliament backed away June 22 from a proposal to permit the regulated large-scale production of cannabis to supply marijuana "coffeeshops." Justice Minister Donner, who strongly opposes legalization of large-scale cannabis production, threatened to resign if Parliament passed a proposed resolution authorizing a trial program for commercial cultivation of cannabis in Maastricht. The parliamentary majority supporting the proposal collapsed during Parliamentary debate when government coalition partner VVD withdrew its support. End Summary.

12. The proposal to allow regulated, large-scale production of cannabis was made by the Mayor of Maastricht, Gerd Leers, as part of his effort to reduce the impact of drug tourism on the city of Maastricht, located on the border with Belgium and Germany. The Cabinet rejected the idea, but a Parliamentary coalition including the opposition Labor Party (PvdA) and government coalition members VVD and D66 supported a resolution to force the Cabinet to permit Leers's plan to go forward. The resolution would have directed the Justice Ministry to suspend prosecution of cannabis producers and dealers who participate in the Maastricht regulated production plan. (NOTE. The sale, in regulated "coffeeshops," of up to five grams of cannabis for personal consumption is legal in the Netherlands. The cultivation or transportation of larger quantities of cannabis, however, is prohibited. END NOTE.) Supporters of the Maastricht plan argue that regulated cannabis production to supply coffeeshops would reduce drugs related nuisance from home growers, and resolve the legal anomaly in which coffeeshops are permitted to sell cannabis products, but not to buy or grow their stock. Justice Minister Donner (CDA), who opposes legalization of cannabis production, threatened twice in the past week to resign if Parliament passed the resolution, warning that "if Parliament wants that, they must find another minister." The VVD party dropped its support of the cannabis cultivation proposal following Donner's resignation threats. Without VVD's support, the plan has little chance of passing Parliament.

13. During the June 22 Parliamentary debate on the resolution, Donner said production of small quantities of cannabis for personal consumption does not violate European Union or international law, but the large-scale production envisaged by Maastricht Mayor Leers would. This view was

echoed by European Commissioner for Justice Franco Frattini in a visit to Dutch Parliament on June 20. Frattini told Dutch parliamentarians, "The line is individual consumption. Production or transportation of soft drugs is against European rules." Donner estimated that supplying the nearly 8,000 kilograms of cannabis sold in Maastricht coffeeshops each year would require the cultivation of 80,000 plants, which he said would require a plantation the size of three soccer fields.

¶4. Donner and Interior Minister Remkes (VVD) have proposed alternatives to Mayor Leers' plans to control drug nuisances in the border region. Specifically, they have called for the destruction of illegal cannabis plantations, closure of all unlicensed marijuana shops, and improved cross-border law enforcement cooperation. Another component of Mayor Leers's plan to limit the negative effects of drug tourism in his district, the relocation of coffee shops from the center of Maastricht to the outskirts of the city, has also been controversial. Belgian authorities sharply criticized Leers' plan, saying that it would merely shift the problem of drug tourism closer to the border with Belgium.

Blakeman